

BEYOND FOCUS 27: WELLSPRINGS OF CREATIVITY

by Susan Taylor, M.A.

Following a magical childhood amongst the hills, lakes, and forests of southern Indiana, Susan Taylor obtained a BA in art education from California State University at Fresno and an MA in humanities from California State University at Dominguez Hills. For the past twenty years she has taught art, photography, pottery, and 3D computer graphics/animation in high school and community college educational systems. Susan is an accredited Monroe Institute Outreach Trainer and recently joined the Professional Division.

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Focus 35

I love people's stories about how they discovered The Monroe Institute. I, like many others, happened upon Robert Monroe's work when *Journeys Out of the Body* just sort of fell off the shelf when I needed it. Soon thereafter I read *Far Journeys*, but I didn't learn about the Institute and begin using Hemi-Sync® tapes and participating in residential programs until 1996. I attended the GATEWAY VOYAGE®, and subsequently completed GUIDELINES®, LIFELINE®, EXPLORATION 27®, and the TRAINER DEVELOPMENT AND ASSESSMENT PROGRAM.

As an art teacher, I quickly recognized Hemi-Sync's potential in the classroom and gave a lot of thought to introducing my adolescent scholars to both the technology and the creative exercises. But the perceived problem of parental disapproval (every teacher's nightmare) seemed to be an insurmountable hurdle. I hemmed and hawed and even declared the task to be impossible over the next couple of years, but the idea persisted. Not until I'd attended *Exploration 27* did a solution present itself. Of course, it was so obvious and simple that I laughed at my inability to see it earlier.

Exploration 27 was a real treat. More than half of the participants were good friends from previous programs, and I anticipated the great adventure of experiencing what Bob had called "The Gathering" in Focus 35. Immediately upon my arrival in Focus 35, two personalities greeted me. They were so totally alien that if I had encountered them outside the security of my CHEC unit with trusted friends and trainers nearby, they would have been utterly terrifying. Safe in familiar surroundings, I approached them with curiosity and openness rather than fear. Heckle and Jekyll, as I irreverently named the pair, found me just as foreign. Over the next couple of days we developed a mutual sense of trust through playful interaction. On the last tape journey to Focus 35, one of them asked to merge with me to get a taste of physical existence. I consented, and the merge was incredible. While the tape instructions were guiding me back to C-1, I felt sad and uncertain. Would I be able to reconnect with them at home? As

my descent to mundane reality started, Heckle and Jekyll said I would receive a gift for granting their request. The gift turned out to be a constantly available doorway into Focus 35. This shimmering circle in the center of my field of vision is a small pinpoint when I'm focused in C-1 and overlays my whole visual field when my awareness is expanded. The portal is a direct line to the two gentle personalities residing at "*The Gathering*."

I Get By, with a Little Help from My Friends

One might legitimately ponder the usefulness of a door leading to Focus 35. I considered that myself and also began to wonder about functioning normally with one foot constantly in a nonphysical dimension. My concern deepened upon discovering that Heckle and Jekyll could also open the door from their side without knocking first. What if they dropped in to "chat" at an inappropriate time? Was this gift a Pandora's box? How does one return a nonphysical gift? I didn't have a nonphysical sale's receipt!

As I began to really question my sanity (as though having two friends in another dimension behind a shimmering door visible to my physical eyes was normal), a comforting presence surrounded me. The presence delivered a ROTE whose core concept was "simple, unconditional trust." The message was accompanied by a flood of memories from early childhood and the realization that my new nonphysical friends weren't really new at all. As a child I had interacted with others like them in an atmosphere of "simple, unconditional trust." The doorway had always been wide open. Somehow, in the process of growing up, I had shut and locked the door and had eventually forgotten that it had ever existed.

Since that realization, I have had no problems living in two dimensions and have found ways to utilize the Focus 35 connection to enhance both my artwork and my teaching. My first intent was to successfully incorporate Hemi-Sync and the other TMI tools into my curriculum. I didn't think about how to do it, I just did it, trusting that the right approach would manifest from the other side of the door. When I play Hemi-Sync tapes, lead the kids through guided journeys into Focus 10/12, or prod them into discussions about consciousness and reality, the words/methods flow to me from the portal. When parents question me about these methods, the right responses emerge from my mouth. At first the kids just humored my crazy ideas, tapes, and exercises; now they insist on them.

Our exercises depend on group dynamics and interaction. At the beginning of the second semester of my photography class—after the students have a reasonable grasp of photographic technique and are accustomed to hearing *METAMUSIC*® playing almost continuously—I stir things up a bit. Out of the blue, I begin a class by getting very close to one of the students and asking, "Who are you?" The following scenario is typical:

Student: "I'm Billy Brown."

Me: "No, that's your name. Who are you?" His classmates snicker and wiggle in their seats.

Student: "I'm a human being."

Me: "No, that's what you are. WHO are you?" The student and the class fall silent. (Aha! They're thinking.)

Me: "Okay, close your eyes and think about the last time you felt really angry. Try to remember how it felt; then tell me what got mad?" The student and class exchange bewildered looks.

Me (stomping my left foot wildly on the floor): "Did your left foot get mad like this?" The whole class bursts out laughing and joins the discussion. Most of the kids decide that they aren't sure who they are, but their "whoness" seems to be located in either their skull or the middle of their chest. Every time we do this exercise, they ask me for the "answer." My response is always, "Heck, I don't know. I was hoping you could tell me."

After one or two weeks of similar activities, every student is thoroughly involved. Most of them have never thought about such things or had an opportunity to ponder questions without right/wrong answers. It's a real joy to watch them shed their "need to be cool" and come alive. An atmosphere of trust and community quickly develops. "Jocks" and "nerds" relate as equals and realize that they have more commonalities than differences.

Next, I introduce the possibility of a "who" totally independent of their bodies or of having more than one "who."

Me: "Where are you?"

Student: "Sitting in photo class."

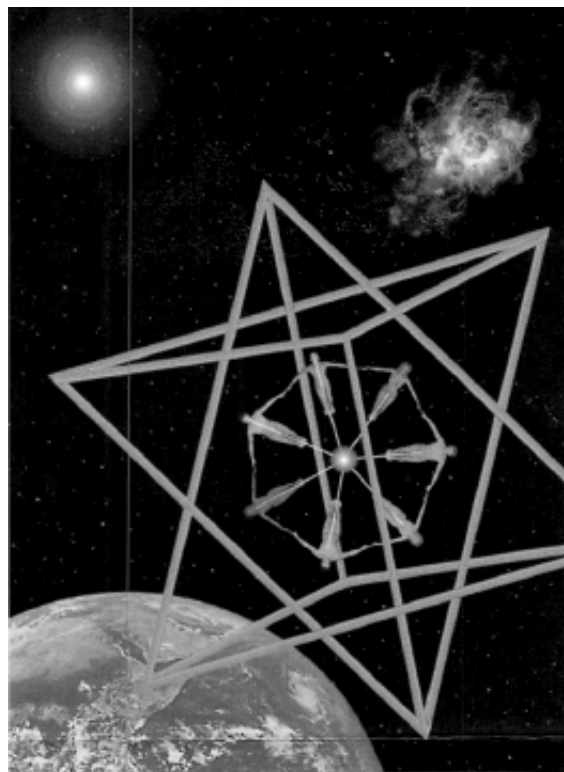
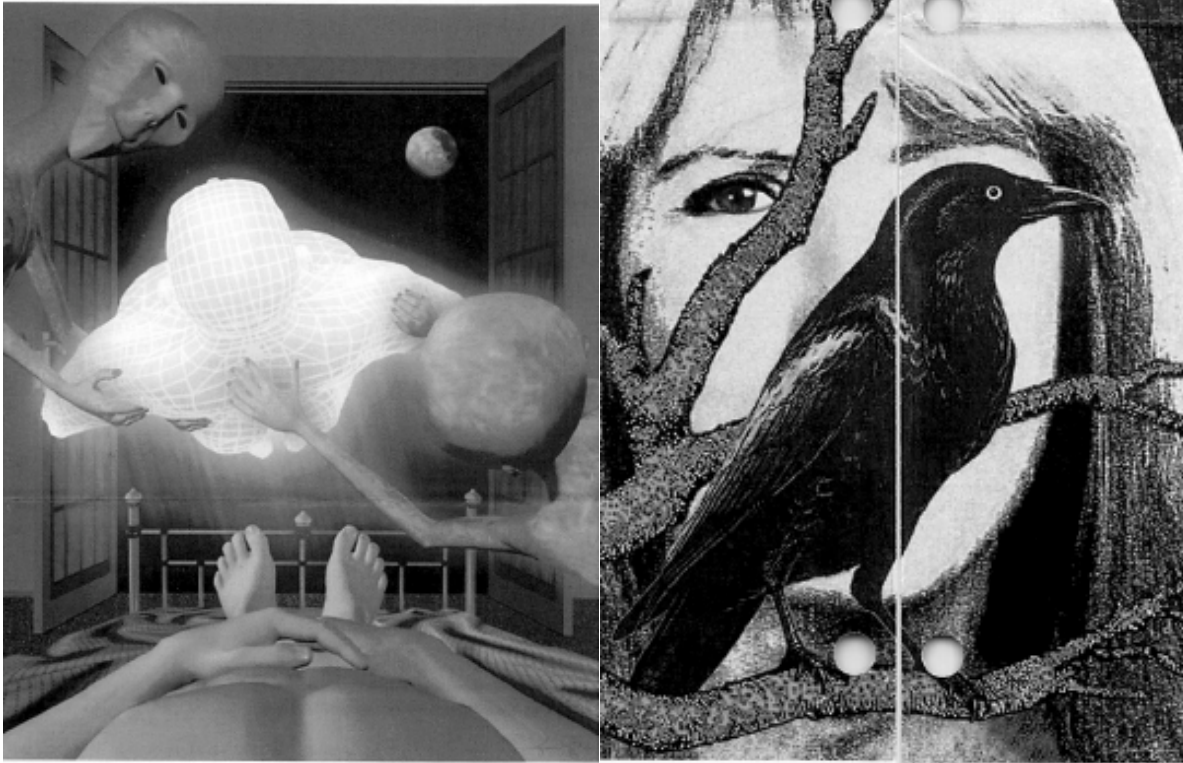
Me: "Are you sure? Let's try an experiment." I put on some *METAMUSIC*, dim the lights, and ask them to close their eyes and get as comfortable as possible. "Imagine that you're at home in your bedroom. Look around the room. What do you see? What's on the walls? the floor? Move into your closet. What's there? Lie on your bed. What does the ceiling look like? What do you hear? What do you smell? Rub your hands across your bedspread. What does it feel like? Move into a drawer. What's in it? Can you smell anything in the drawer or feel any textures?"

When they return, I ask for a show of hands if they successfully perceived their bedroom. Everyone usually has some degree of success. Then we discuss how one sense generally comes easier than the others, and they identify whether they are primarily seers, smellers, hearers, or touchers. I ask, "During this exercise, where were you? in the classroom? in your bedroom? in both?" The ensuing interchange becomes quite lively. Interestingly, their need to arrive at a "right" answer has markedly diminished.

After a few weeks the class is comfortable with the odd goings-on and adept at relaxing with *METAMUSIC*. At that point, they're asked to create an imaginary space, much as we do during *Lifeline*. I emphasize that there are no rules or limits. They are to create a place where they feel comfortable, safe, and happy. I ask only that they include a blank wall somewhere in their space. For the rest of the school year, each class starts with five to ten minutes of silence for the students to relax in that special haven. They learn how to develop subject matter for their photo assignments by staring at the blank wall and intending an idea to appear on it. This approach has been very successful, and their efforts soon exhibit much more originality and human interest. Being an extremely right-brained artsy type, I haven't done a statistical analysis of Hemi-Sync's effect on student achievement. But based on twenty years of teaching experience with over three thousand students, I can personally confirm that my classroom atmosphere is calmer, quieter, and more productive. The students' creativity is at an all-time high. They are more willing to take risks and expose their feelings.

Open access to Focus 35 has also affected my life outside of the classroom, particularly my art. Abstract symbols are the heart of my information-processing style. In college my classmates took notes; I drew abstruse shapes to represent the lecture concepts. My scribbles were nonsense to others, but they triggered total recall for me. Needless to say, no one ever asked to borrow my notes! As a beginning art student, I struggled to convey abstract ideas/experiences in a concrete visual way. Drawing and painting lifelike renditions of things didn't interest me. If I wanted a realistic picture of a tree, a camera could do the job better and quicker. I envisioned expressing ideas, not things, and translating ideas into visual images that were meaningful to others was very challenging. So I majored in pottery, the ultimate cop-out. After all, a pot's a pot.

Since my initial ventures into the Focus levels, a wealth of experiences have accumulated that beg to be depicted. However, those experiences are usually not visual. They are more like a "knowing." My residential program and personal meditation journals are full of scribbled imagery that vividly evokes the experience but is absolutely no help in re-creating it to share. The gift from Focus 35 changed that. Now I need only remember the experience with the intent of translating it visually and a picture appears through the "doorway." As time permits, I am producing the images that are "given" to me, and a few examples [see below]z accompany this article. The response from fellow adventurers who resonate with the images suggests that I may have the problem licked?with a little help from my friends!



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